



# USGS Mentoring Program

## Protégé Handbook

*"Fit and chemistry must be considered when pairing the mentor and the protégé.  
If the two don't get along, it matters little what each can offer the other  
in terms of knowledge and skills."*

—Michael Zey, Building a Successful Formal Mentor Program

Modified from Chronus Mentoring Handbook

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Mentoring is a fundamental human relationship in which a person invests time, energy and expertise to nurture the growth of another person. Mentors are the special people in our lives who help us reach our potential. Their styles may range from that of a persistent encourager who boosts our self-confidence to that of a stern taskmaster who teaches us to appreciate excellence in performance. Whatever their style, they care.

Mentoring is often spoken about in corporate circles, but mentoring can have an impact much deeper than work performance. When a mentor accepts and applies the mentor's wisdom in diverse ways, it can lead to all-encompassing personal growth. During the process, the two work together to discover and develop the protege's latent abilities and encourage knowledge and skill acquisition as opportunities arise. The mentor serves as a tutor, counselor, and friend, enabling us to sharpen skills and increase knowledge.

An important note: *To gain from mentoring, you have to reach out, grasp, and learn from the mentor's offered wisdom. You can only experience the benefits of mentoring by assuming ownership of what the mentor has offered and using it appropriately.*

The following guidelines will help you make the best of your **mentoring relationship**.

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## Getting Acquainted

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Online messaging is an unthreatening, flexible way to ease into a relationship with a new person. Many people find it easier to open up to someone new through writing.

Use email, Google chat or Webex conferencing to get to know each other, plan meetings and discuss progress on tasks and milestones. To break the ice, ask your mentor questions and share a little about yourself:

- Jobs, hobbies, and extracurricular activities
- Classes you have taken, projects you have worked on, or career-related interests
- Your favorite class in college, favorite book, favorite movie, etc.

On a more serious note, you are also encouraged to voice your concerns with your mentor. In case you find it difficult to discuss topics using technical terms, paraphrase your questions. Although it might take several discussions to clarify a point, your mentor is likely to appreciate your interest and your passion to learn.

## Means to Communicate

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There are various ways in which you can communicate with your mentor. These include:

- 1 Email
- 2 Google Chat
- 3 Telephone
- 4 Audio or video conversations using Google
- 5 WebEx
- 6 Meeting in person when co-located

When in-person interaction is not possible due to distance and time, we strongly encourage you to use the rich online communication and other means of communication afforded you.

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## Set Your Goals and Summarize Completed Sessions

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To have a successful **mentoring relationship** you must:

- Understand your needs
- Set your goals
- Convey your needs and goals to your mentor
- Discuss how you can accomplish your goals
- After completing a discussion session, write a summary to form new action items

For a good start to the first two, answer the following questions:

- **What are your goals for this mentoring relationship?** (e.g., competency development, career advancement, leadership skills development, gain knowledge in a particular topic area, etc.)
- **How will you know if you reached these goals?** (e.g., improved performance, promoted, attained a new credential, etc.)
- **What challenges can you anticipate?** (e.g., availability of advancement opportunities, need to further your formal education, length of time needed to develop a new skill or competency)

Make the best use of your time with your mentor: take the time now to define goals. You may find the Mentoring Forms supplied you to be very helpful with this process.

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## Effective Online Communication

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Communication is a two-way process that includes just about any type of interaction with another person, from subtle to overt. Poor communication can leave us feeling angry or worried.

In person or on the phone, you can use voice modulation, facial expressions, and hand gestures to convey meaning. Because those cues are absent in writing, written communication is a skill and an art. The better people can express themselves, the more the relationship will deepen.

When communicating through writing, the following tips will help prevent miscommunication.

- **Meaningful subject line**—A good subject line ensures that the recipient recognizes the importance of your message and doesn't delete it accidentally. The subject line should also serve as a summary, conveying a clear idea of the topic you want to discuss.

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- **Clear and concise messages**—Take the time to write clear, concise messages. Correspondingly, if you receive messages that are not clear and concise, take the time to get clarification. Do you clearly understand your mentor’s points? If not, provide an opportunity to restate, elaborate or reconsider the intended message.
  - **Investigating assumptions**— What assumptions may have been made, whether stated explicitly or not? To uncover assumptions and prevent misinterpretations, state your understanding of your mentor’s message or ask for clarification.
  - **Communicating about communication**—It is very important to inform your mentor of your schedule well in advance. This prevents the unnecessary frustration of a communication breakdown.

Online messaging has its challenges, but it also has advantages in many situations. Use every means possible to communicate with your mentor.

## Networking Tips

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Networking is a learned skill that takes time and practice to improve. Your mentor has likely leveraged a network of contacts at various times in life. Learn how your mentor built his or her network. Appreciate the effort that goes into maintaining these quality relationships. If your mentor is willing, ask for an introduction to contacts who may be able to help you reach your goals.

When you approach your mentor or any of his or her contacts, be sure to follow this networking etiquette:

- **Ask politely**—When asking for a favor, ask politely. Examples of ways to ask are: "Perhaps you can point me in the right direction," and "Maybe you could help me..."
- **Follow up**—Use the 48-hour rule. Respond to phone messages and emails within 48 hours, and send thank-you or nice-to-meet-you notes or emails after a meeting within 48 hours.
- **Mention your referrer**—When calling a person to whom someone referred you, mention your contact's name. For example, "John suggested I contact you about..."

We wish you the very best in building your network of contacts!

## Suggested Activities for Mentors and Protégés

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- Read a book/article together
- Meet in person or virtually your Mentor’s colleagues and expand your network of contacts.

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- Discuss a particular project with which you are involved

## Don't Lose Sight of Your Goals

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There might be times in your mentoring relationship when progress might stagnate and you need to re-energize. Try the following:

- Revisit your goals. Are you on course?
- Could you have done something better? Take responsibility for driving success. Self-actualization and enthusiasm will help you and your partner move forward.
- Evaluate how long you will need to achieve your goals. Set a specific date—time-bounded goals are more likely to be realized. Strategize for success.

The point: continually reaffirm goals and commitment. Your mentor will follow your lead.

## Help during Periods of Transition

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As you near the completion of your mentoring partnership, you may wonder whether your takeaways from the mentoring relationship will smooth your transition into future endeavors. You may have some loose ends to tie or some fears about moving on.

We encourage you and your mentor to discuss your transition to life post-partnership. Your mentor may be in a position to help you better prepare for what lies ahead and reduce any anxieties you have about the changes that await.

Nothing can replace experience!

## Need for a Good Closure

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When mentoring partnerships end, some do so with goals accomplished. Some do not, for a number of reasons. Yet even less productive mentoring relationships can benefit from good closure. A successful exit strategy includes five steps:

- 1 **Processing conclusions**—Process the learning that took place because of the relationship while working towards goals. (Final Thoughts Worksheet)
  - 2 **Integrating what was learned**—Discuss how to apply the learning and take it to the next level.
  - 3 **Celebrating success**—Attend the end of the partnership virtual celebration.
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- 4 **Redefining the relationship**—Talk about how the relationship is to continue, and what it will look like: will you transition from a professional mentoring relationship to that of colleagues or friends? Will the relationship cease entirely?
  - 5 **Moving on**—Both partners let go and identify ways of keeping in touch, if appropriate and mutually desired.

### Provide Regular Feedback

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It is important to provide regular feedback on your mentoring experience to the Program Managers and your Supervisors. Please complete any surveys you receive. Your feedback will help the Program Managers learn how to serve you better. In addition, provide your mentor with constructive feedback as you go, to improve the quality of the relationship and to support your mentor's future mentoring endeavors.